Who Killed Martin Luther King?

A Fateful Meeting With 'Raoul'

Nine years ago, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn. Not long after, an ex-convict named James Earl Ray was arrested and charged with being the lone gunman.

But was he really alone?

Ray — following his guilty plea and sentence to life in prison — contended that he was only a minor character in a larger conspiracy to kill King. Ray charged that he had been coerced into his guilty plea, and that he was not the man who pulled the trigger.

In an explosive new book, "Code Name Zorro," authors Mark Lane and Dick Gregory probe Ray's story — and find evidence that he may be telling the truth. This is the second in a four-part series of excerpts from the book.

By MARK LANE

James Earl Ray's explanation to me of his movements through the United States from Canada to Mexico, his purchase of a rifle in Birmingham, and ultimately his presence in Memphis on April 4th in the vicinity of the murder scene is either basically true, or the intricate and comprehensive product of a brilliant mind.

For the narrative explains in a cohesive fashion all of Ray's otherwise inexplicable actions. Ray's relationship with a man he refers to only as Raoul becomes the Rosetta Stone of the defendant's odyssey.

ACCORDING TO RAY, he fled to Canada after escaping from the Missouri penitentiary in Jefferson City. While in Montreal, he said, he "let the word get around" that he was willing to undertake low-risk criminal activities if his needs could be met.

According to Ray a man he subsequently referred to as Raoul approached him and indicated that he could provide adequate documents and sufficient funds if Ray helped him to accomplish various projects. After a series of meetings Ray said the two men reached an agreement.

In furtherance of that agreement Ray began to surreptitiously deliver articles across the border from Canada to the United States and from the United States to Mexico. Ray was not told, and he states that he did not ask, about the contents of the packages. He, of course, presumed that he was smuggling contraband from one country to another.

Ray told me that Raoul said "he would probably need me in about two or three or four months. This was in October 1967. He said I should call him at his New Orleans telephone number once in a while. I told him that I would be in Los Angeles and he said that he would write to me there."

RAY SAID THAT approximately four months before Dr. King was killed he returned to New Orleans to meet Raoul in a tavern on the border of the French Quarter. At that time Raoul told Ray that he would have a job for him to do in about three months and that it was to be Ray's last assignment.

"He told me that when that job was done he was going to give me $12,000 and all the documents that I would need to travel wherever I wanted to outside of the States. He wouldn't tell me what the job was, told me not to ask about it, and gave me $500 in cash."

Ray also told me that subsequently Raoul contacted him and told him to meet him in New Orleans on March 20, 1968, less than two months before King was killed.

RAOUL AND RAY traveled to Atlanta together. There, according to Ray, Raoul "told me that he wanted me to buy a large-bore deer rifle with a telescopic sight. He said that if the rifle was approved of by the buyers that I was to get about a dozen more and also about 200 cheap rifles. The good one had to be new, the others they didn't care about."

Ray said that since he had Alabama identification it might be better if he went to Birmingham to buy the rifles. Raoul agreed.

Ray said, "We met in Birmingham and Aoul and I got the addresss of a rifle place, Aeromarine Supply, out of a newspaper advertisment, which said they had a lot of rifles."

According to Ray, Raoul gave him about $750 and told him to buy the large-bore deer rifle. Ray purchased a rifle and showed it to Raoul in a Birmingham motel. He said Raoul was displeased — "said it was the wrong kind." Raoul pointed out to Ray the rifle that he preferred from the catalogue and Ray called the store and said that he wanted to exchange it.

RAY EXCHANGED rifles. Raoul told him, he said, to meet him "in Memphis on April 3 in the evening at the Rebel Motel and to bring the rifle." Ray said that he did meet Raoul as planned and that he was told that he was to go back to Birmingham in a few days to purchase some more rifles and "a lot of cheap foreign rifles so that they could be shipped New Orleans."

Ray said that "before he left h said I should meet him the next da at four o'clock in the afternoon at rooming house at 422½ South Mai Street. He wrote down the addre and said to meet him in the ba downstairs if he was not in the roor ing house."

Ray said that he met Raoul in Jim Grill on the afternoon of April 1968, and that subsequently the went together to a room in the roor ing house.

"WHEN WE GOT THERE Rao said we would be there for a fe days 'so bring the Mustang arour and get your stuff out of it and brir it up here.'"

Quite obviously Ray's location the time the shot was fired remair the single most important questio in considering the case against hir It has been pointed out that he ha vacillated when asked to establis that locale.

Ray conceded the accuracy of th accusation when I inquired and no he explained it this way. As in th case with much of the evidence, th matter has neither been tested b cross-examination nor has it bee offered in a courtroom under oath.

"I WANTED TO testify at the tria Lawyers can say and the judges ca agree that if you don't testify it can be held against you. But jurors wa to see you. They want to hear th defendant talk. I didn't kill King an I wanted to testify. Toward the en of our arrangement, when it wa breaking down, old man Hanes (*A thur Hanes Sr., Ray's first defen lawyer*) came in to see me. He sai 'Huie (*William Bradford Huie, wh had paid Ray to help him write book on the King killing*) wants know where you were when Kin was shot.'

"I was surprised that Huie didn ask me long before. I might have to him then. Now I said, 'Tell Huie could have happened this way.' The I told him a story about me waitin in the car, Raoul running down th steps and jumping in the back seat the car.

"I said 'Tell Huie that Raoul pulle a sheet over him in the back seat. mentioned a sheet because Huie is interested in the Klan I thought h would appreciate it. It never ha pened that way at all. The next mor ing young Hanes came in to see m He said Huie is mad. 'He doesn't wa to know how it could have happene he wants to know how it did happen I just sort of smiled. I wasn't going give away my testimony to the oth side in advance."

I asked Ray if he would tell m where he was when Dr. King wa murdered.

"Yes. I'll tell you. It looks now as I may not get a trial at all so I'll te you what happened."

Tomorrow: Ray on the run — fro the cops, and Raoul.

From the book "Code Name Zorro," by Mark Lan and Dick Gregory. Copyright c 1977 by Mark Lane a Dick Gregory. Published by Prentice-Hall Inc., Engl wood Cliffs, NJ.

RAY CAPTURED: After an intercontinental manhunt, accused assassin James Earl Ray is led to a life sentence. But Ray claimed that he was the victim of a frame-up.

IS THIS 'RAOUL'? A police composite sketch of King's killer, based on eye-witness descriptions, proved inconvenient when Ray was arrested; the figure had "sandy colored" hair (Ray did not), was both shorter and older. Is this, in fact, the man Ray called "Raoul"?

IN JAIL: Ray does time — and waits for a vindication that may never come.